



**New Internationalist**  
The people, the ideas, the action in the fight for global justice

# OUR EARTH



**NEW INTERNATIONALIST EASIER ENGLISH  
INTERMEDIATE READY LESSON**

## This lesson:

**Vocabulary** for talking about the Earth

**Speaking** about problem and solutions

**Reading** about the Earth

**Listening** to a TED talk

**Dictation** of part of a text

**Action** choice of writing / poster etc



Where is this? And why is it important?



Do you know these words? Ask  
each other or look them up:

tar sands  
poison  
ecocide

pipeline  
biodiversity  
exploitation

## Match:

1/ tar sands

2/ poison

3/  
exploitation

4/ pipeline

5/  
biodiversity

6/ ecocide

- a) all natural plant and animal life in an area
- b) killing/destroying parts of the earth
- c) areas of sand with heavy oil
- d) something that causes illness or death (often chemical)
- e) using people or things badly to benefit from them (eg. make money)
- f) a long metal pipe to take eg. oil or gas a long distance

# Read to find four problems with dirty oil in Madagascar:

[http://eewiki.newint.org/index.php/Problems\\_w  
ith\\_dirty\\_oil\\_in\\_Madagascar](http://eewiki.newint.org/index.php/Problems_with_dirty_oil_in_Madagascar)

(or on following slide)



Madagascar is an amazing place for biology. Conservation International says that this island in Indian Ocean has 'eight plant families, five bird families, and five primate families that live nowhere else on Earth'. Eighty-five per cent of its species are only found on the island, and nowhere else in the world. But not so many people know about the large areas of tar sands under two-thirds of the country. There is nearly 30,000 km<sup>2</sup> of bitumen and heavy oil in the dry Melaky region of northwestern Madagascar. This means companies could get about 25 billion barrels of oil from it. Big petroleum companies really want to get the oil. It could become the largest tar sands project after the very large ones in Alberta, Canada.

The British-based company Madagascar Oil is already producing heavy oil at Tsimororo (about 500 kilometres northwest of the capital) by forcing water as steam into the ground.

60 percent of the very large Bemolanga tar sands area, north of Tsimororo, is owned by French energy company Total and 40 per cent is owned by Madagascar Oil. Total stopped working there in 2011 when the price of oil fell to below production costs but the company still plans to produce oil from tar sands in 2020.

Melaky is one of the poorest regions in Madagascar. The people look after cattle and grow small amounts of food. The tar sands are under the land used by the cattle. More than 100,000 people in villages above the oil deposits could have big problems with poison in their water and land from the mining wastes. There is only one river in the region. They would use this water to get the oil out of the tar sands – they need about 10 barrels of water for each barrel of oil, double the amount of water they use in Canada.

'The risk is not just for the people who live along the river by the project site,' Jean-Pierre Ratsimbazafy (an activist from Melaky) told TarSandsWorld. 'It's also dangerous for animals and people who live down the river. This river goes into the ocean, so it could destroy the biodiversity in the ocean and the coast areas, and be very dangerous for the people who live along the coast.'

Near the oil fields are the stone tsingy forests. These are high limestone rocks in the jungle with a lot of rare species of plants and animals. A lot of this amazing landscape is in Tsingy de Bemahara, one of the largest protected areas on the island (and protected by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site). But the Beanka area in the north is not so protected. If they move tar sands oil to the coast, they will build a pipeline through or near the Beanka tsingy. Biologist Steve Goodman says this would be a disaster.

'Beanka is an amazing diverse and unique forest,' says Goodman, a Madagascar specialist. 'If they build a pipeline, this would bring in different types of exploitation – companies would come to take the rare hardwoods and hunt the animals. If there were problems with the pipeline, it would be so terrible if the oil came out into this area.'

# What can we do to help the Earth?





# What does Polly want to do to help the Earth?

<http://tedxtalks.ted.com/video/TEDxExeter-Polly-Higgins-Ecocid>

**watch 0.00 to 4.28, then discuss**

**Now your teacher will dictate a summary of what she said – write it down**

## Check what you wrote:

In 2005 I was representing a man with a serious workplace injury. There was a moment of silence while we were waiting for the judges, and I looked out the window and thought: 'The Earth has been badly injured and harmed too, and something needs to be done about that.' My next thought changed my life: **'The Earth needs a good lawyer, too.'** When I looked around to see how I could defend the Earth in court, I saw that it was impossible. But what if the earth had rights like we as humans have rights? We have international laws that make killing people a crime. So we could make "ecocide" (the destruction of the earth) a crime too.

<http://newint.org/blog/2014/03/05/polly-higgins-interview/>

Now read the rest of the  
interview with Polly Higgins and  
match the questions to the  
answers



<http://newint.org/blog/2014/03/05/polly-higgins-interview/>

**1/ Are there any laws now against ecocide?**

**2/ In your research you found that the UN had been thinking about introducing a crime against nature for decades. What went wrong?**

**3/ Is there a chance to bring back an ecocide law?**

**4/ People who are against the ecocide campaign say that climate change is the biggest environmental challenge. But there is not one criminal we can punish for it. They would have to punish everyone.**

a) The Rome Statute can be reviewed in 2015, so it is important now to fight to change it. 122 nations – including Australia – sign the Rome Statute. So one head of state needs to ask for a change. There could then be a five-year transitional period and the law could be working in 2020.

b) There was a lot of destruction of the environment in Vietnam during the war years, so they made a national ecocide law in 1990. The USSR also had ecocide laws, so after the end of the USSR, many of the new countries kept these laws. But ecological destruction goes across national boundaries; it is often very large multinational companies that cause it; so we need an international law.

c) That's why the ecocide law is so good. The law doesn't have to accept the theory that humans cause climate change. It looks at it holistically. Climate change is a symptom of damage to our ecosystems. The important thing is to create a criminal law that will stop dangerous industrial activity. And that's where the ecocide laws will help. At the moment, big companies that damage the environment simply pay a fine, and they are prepared for this. But if ecocide is a law enforced by the International Criminal Court, that would be very different. The people at the top who make decisions go to a criminal court of law. That includes corporate CEOs, heads of state, regional premiers and heads of financial institutions.

d) Before the Rome Statute (leading to the International Criminal Court), they planned five central international crimes: genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, crimes of aggression and ecocide. But many countries fought against this – particularly the US, Britain, Netherlands and France – so they cut ecocide.



# What can we do?



Choose one of these:

- a) find out more at <http://eradicatingecocide.com/>
- b) write a letter to your government
- c) like “Ecocide is a crime” on Facebook
- d) make a poster: how can we help the Earth?
- e) read about and sign this Avaaz petition:

[https://secure.avaaz.org/en/petition/NOW\\_IS\\_OUR\\_CHANCE\\_TO\\_END\\_ECOCIDE/?tWdSWab](https://secure.avaaz.org/en/petition/NOW_IS_OUR_CHANCE_TO_END_ECOCIDE/?tWdSWab)

# Homework:

Why aren't developing countries that have a lot of natural resources rich? Read this to find out:



[http://eewiki.newint.org/index.php/We\\_need\\_commodities](http://eewiki.newint.org/index.php/We_need_commodities)

Then read the original:

<http://newint.org/features/2014/03/01/keynote-commodities/>

Or the original of the other two readings:

<http://newint.org/features/2014/03/01/a-tsingular-beauty/>

<http://newint.org/blog/2014/03/05/polly-higgins-interview/>